

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson*****The President's FY 2011 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security***

February 25, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “The President’s FY 2011 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security”:

“I want to thank Secretary Napolitano for being flexible about testifying in support of the President’s Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security after back-to-back blizzards forced us to postpone this hearing.

On February 1st, President Obama requested just over \$56 billion for the Department of Homeland Security as a part of his Fiscal Year 2011 budget request. Overall, under the President’s proposal, the Department’s budget is slated to increase by about 3% over last year’s funding level. Given the current fiscal environment, the President is to be commended for showing an ongoing commitment to enhancing our Nation’s preparedness, response and recovery capabilities.

The Department’s missions—both homeland security and non-homeland security—require a budget request that is far-reaching and impacts --

- the security of Americans who travel by air, rail, and sea;
- the capacity of communities to be prepared for and respond to terrorism and other hazards, including the threat posed by dangerous criminal aliens; and
- the ability of our Nation and operators of critical infrastructure to find innovative approaches to foster resiliency in the face of an ever-evolving terrorist threat.

In reviewing this budget request, I am pleased to see you tackle the issue of over-reliance on contractors and presenting a Balanced Workforce Strategy. Since its inception in 2003, contractor-dependence has stood in the way of DHS becoming the Federal agency that Congress envisioned and the American people deserve. Madame Secretary, you are to be commended for taking on this challenge that for so many years went unaddressed by your predecessors and for setting a goal of converting 3,300 contractor positions to DHS positions by the end of the year. This is a step in the right direction. However, given that that the Department relies on more than 200,000 contractors to operate, a great deal more work will need to be done to ensure that DHS moves away from an over-reliance on contractors.

While I support the substance of most of this budget request, I do have some concerns. While I understand that reducing personnel at the U.S. Border Patrol and U.S. Coast Guard will bring short-term savings to the Department, I am concerned that years of knowledge and experience will be lost and that there may be a resulting reduction in DHS’ resources and capabilities to fulfill all its missions.

I am also greatly concerned the budget seeks to consolidate a number of important free-standing grant programs into the State Homeland Security Grant Program. I worry that this consolidation will make it more difficult for local communities to receive much-needed funding. It also troubles me that for the second year in a row, the budget decreases funding for vital first responder grant programs just as State and local communities are struggling to maintain the capability gains that have been achieved in recent years. I am particularly disappointed that Centers of Excellence and

other University Programs—including the Minority Serving Institutions program—that DHS has supported since DHS was established would be cut by nearly 20% cut under this budget.

One last area that I strongly believe was not well-served by this budget is maritime cargo screening. I find it incredulous that this budget decreases funding for international cargo screening programs by almost 48%. It is hard to believe that these programs, which got short-shrift by the previous Administration, are being further downscaled under this budget when there has not been a single legislative proposal submitted to alter the statutory mandate on international cargo security. As you know, under the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act, DHS is responsible for ensuring that 100% of cargo that enters into the United States is scanned. I just do not see how moving the few DHS personnel that you have in the field, targeting cargo for screening, back to the U.S. gets you any closer to meeting the mandate.

That said, I look forward to working with you Madam Secretary to ensure that the Department has the resources it needs to execute all its missions—including to prevent and respond to the threat of terrorism.”

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